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Arms Control: Prospects for early agreement on a treaty to limit the use of the seabeds for military purposes appear to be poor.

The US delegation to the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Committee talks in Geneva believes the Soviet delegation lacks the authority to try to negotiate a compromise between the US and Soviet drafts of a seabeds treaty during the current session, which may end on 28 August.

A member of the Soviet delegation earlier this week said that his delegation was not ready to begin bilateral talks on the treaty articles. He expressed strong disappointment with the US position, saying it had given the impression the US did not want serious negotiations this session.

The Soviets favor banning all military uses of the seabeds beyond the 12-mile territorial waters of any state. The US would exclude only weapons of mass destruction from the seabeds beyond a three-mile coastal band. Another area of conflict concerns the type of verification needed to police an agreement.

The Soviets, who have been playing up differences between the Western delegations, may feel that with the passage of time pressure will be exerted on the US to accept a more comprehensive ban. The British delegation, in urging the US to support Britain's plan to offer a new and somewhat more comprehensive proposal, has been stressing its assessment that opinion in Geneva strongly favors a ban going far beyond the US proposal.

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